



REGARDS D'EPOQUE

★

GLANCE AT THE PAST

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Avec le soutien de



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“Never before had an individual, whether king or commoner, created such an entity and it was all done without the classic assistance of armed conquest, royal marriage, or assassinations.”

Tom Marvel (American journalist)
In “*The New Congo*”, 1949

Introduction

The Royal Museum for Central Africa reopens its doors in Tervuren at a time when calls for a radically new approach, favouring the inclusion of Africans themselves in the narrative, are dominating the news.

Such an adaptation, which aims to broaden the point of view, by more explicitly including Africans as actors and authors of their civilization, their contributions, and their specificities, is logical and perfectly normal. From this perspective, the renewed Museum is in tune with the times. Everywhere, the Museums built during the colonial periods favoured the perspective of the colonizers and the action of the colonial power in relation to the country and the local populations.

In this update, arbitrations were necessary. Should we introduce a balance and present to the public of today and tomorrow, in objective terms, both the achievements and weaknesses, the excesses and prowess, the achievements of intensive development and the servitudes of external domination? Should we add to the eyes of the colonizers, the experiences and feelings of the Africans themselves?

Our answer is positive, without reservation: to present objective facts, to allow visitors to leave with an in-depth and nuanced knowledge of the history of men, women, children, families, missionaries, idealists, adventurers, profiteers, investor developers,... Not only have they rubbed shoulders with each other, but they have also - together - achieved the feat of combining in this vast «Heart of Africa» one of the most intense transformations combining protection and respect for rich and already flourishing cultures with the spectacular development of an emerging economic power, thanks to a system of widespread promotion of all segments of the population.

A powerful current of fashionable thinking tends to want to retain only the negative aspects of colonization, to accredit theories of abuse, vio-

lence and racism. Anyone who wants to hear the facts, verify the realities, evaluate the results, will admit that this is an unjustified excessive pendulum swing that truncates history. How else can we explain than by a general feeling of appreciation for the multifaceted progress made by the largest segments of the population, in the spirit of the times, the fact that the Belgian colonial period was able to take place with a minimum number of expatriate agents, with a minimum number of elements of the Force Publique, with the intense collaboration of all the living forces of the Congo (colonial administration, chiefdoms, large companies, missionaries, planters, trained workers, health officers, etc.).

The new Museum will obviously have a clear discourse on the moral reprehension of colonization, but this cannot be the end of the discussion. On the contrary, it should mark a new beginning. We hope that the renewed Museum will become a place where all voices and elements can continue to be addressed and where no one will feel excluded.

On the intellectual level, the following question deserves to be asked :
“What if there had not been Belgian colonization in the Congo ?
With the advent of industrialization, would the country have been the scene of geostrategic wars and violence ? How many people would have died from various diseases or internal battles ? Where would the 1960 Congo have been with literacy and infrastructure ?

An “African museum” cannot be confined to the Belgian experience of the Congo, but it is placed in a broader universal and historical perspective, with links to earlier forms of colonization in Europe (Romans) and Africa (Arabs), other colonial societies (France, Great Britain, Portugal, Netherlands, Germany, ...) and more recent and modern forms of presence and domination. It would not be inappropriate, as long as the vision is broadened in time and space, to also include a debate on current forms of governance, endogenous obstacles marking the development of African peoples.

In this spirit of openness to the various aspects of this tranche of History, UROME presents a sample of texts and testimonies from the period that have the advantage of situating the realities on the ground in their historical context and thus providing an objective perspective.

Introduction

Le Musée Royal d'Afrique Centrale rouvre ses portes à Tervuren à un moment où les appels à une approche radicalement nouvelle, privilégiant l'inclusion des Africains eux-mêmes dans le narratif dominant l'actualité.

Une telle adaptation qui veut élargir le point de vue, en incluant plus explicitement les Africains comme acteurs et auteurs de leur civilisation, de leurs apports, et de leurs spécificités, est logique et parfaitement normal. Sous cet angle le Musée renouvelé s'inscrit dans l'air du temps. Partout, les Musées érigés pendant les périodes coloniales privilégiaient l'angle de vue des colonisateurs et l'action de la puissance coloniale par rapport au pays, et aux populations locales.

Dans cette mise à jour, des arbitrages se sont avérés nécessaires. Faut-il introduire un équilibre et présenter au public d'aujourd'hui et de demain, en termes objectifs, à la fois les réalisations et les faiblesses, les excès et les prouesses, les acquis d'un développement intensif et les servitudes de la domination extérieure ? Faut-il ajouter au regard des colonisateurs, le vécu et le ressenti des Africains eux-mêmes?

Notre réponse est positive, sans réserve: présenter des faits objectifs, permettre aux visiteurs de repartir avec des connaissances approfondies et nuancées de l'histoire des hommes, femmes, enfants, familles, missionnaires, idéalistes, aventuriers profiteurs, investisseurs développeurs, ... Qui se sont non seulement côtoyés, mais ont – ensemble – Africains et Européens, réalisé la prouesse de conjuguer dans ce vaste "coeur de l'Afrique" l'une des plus intenses mutations alliant protection et respect des riches cultures déjà florissantes au développement spectaculaire d'une puissance économique émergente, à la faveur d'un système de promotion généralisée de toutes les couches des populations.

Un puissant courant de pensée à la mode, tend à ne vouloir retenir que les aspects négatifs de la colonisation, à accréditer des thèses d'abus, d'exactions, de racisme. Toute personne qui veut entendre les faits, vé-

rifier les réalités, évaluer les résultats, admettra qu'il s'agit là d'un mouvement de balancier excessif injustifié qui tronque l'Histoire. Comment expliquer autrement que par un sentiment généralisé d'appréciation des progrès multiformes par les plus larges segments des populations, dans l'esprit du temps, le fait que la période coloniale Belge ait pu s'effectuer avec un minimum d'agents expatriés, avec un minimum d'éléments de la Force Publique, avec une collaboration intense de toutes les forces vives du Congo (Administration coloniale, chefferies, grandes sociétés, missionnaires, planteurs, travailleurs formés, agents de santé, etc.).

Le nouveau Musée aura évidemment un discours clair sur la réprehension morale de la colonisation, mais cela ne peut pas être la fin de la discussion. Bien au contraire, cela devrait en marquer un nouveau début. Nous formons le voeu que le Musée renouvelé deviendra un lieu où toutes les voix et tous les éléments pourront continuer à être adressés et où personne ne se sentira exclu.

Sur le plan intellectuel, la question suivante mérite d'être posée :
“Et s'il n'y avait pas eu la colonisation belge au Congo ?”

Avec l'avènement de l'industrialisation le pays aurait-il été le théâtre de guerres géostratégiques et de violences ? Combien de personnes seraient décédées de diverses maladies ou de luttes intestines ? Où aurait été le Congo de 1960 avec l'alphabétisation et l'infrastructure ?

Un “musée africain” ne peut pas être confiné à l'expérience belge du Congo, mais il se place dans une perspective universelle et historique plus large, avec des liens vers les formes antérieures de colonisation en Europe (Romains) et en Afrique (Arabes), d'autres sociétés coloniales (France, Grande Bretagne, Portugal, Pays Bas, Allemagne, ...) et des formes plus récentes et plus modernes de présences et de dominations. Il ne serait d'ailleurs pas déplacé, tant que la vision est élargie dans le temps et dans l'espace, d'inclure également un débat sur les formes actuelles de gouvernance, les impulsions et les freins endogènes marquant l'essor des peuples africains.

Dans cet esprit d'ouverture aux divers aspects de cette tranche d'Histoire, l'UROME vous présente un échantillon de textes et de témoignages d'époque qui ont l'avantage de situer les réalités du terrain dans leur contexte historique et d'apporter ainsi un éclairage objectif.

Décrets émis par le Roi Léopold II

Certains Décrets de Léopold II, Roi des Belges, Souverain de l'Etat Indépendant du Congo, donnent une image bien différente de ce roi tellement décrié. Tous ces Décrets étaient publiés dans le Bulletin officiel de l'EIC et sont bien antérieurs à la création de la Congo Reform Association (March 1904).

Le Décret sur les titres fonciers (1885) prévoyait que :

- l'enregistrement des titres fonciers des non-indigènes;
- les terres occupées par des populations indigènes, sous l'autorité de leurs chefs, continueront d'être régies par les coutumes et les usages locaux;
- les contrats faits avec les indigènes pour l'acquisition ou la location de parties du sol ne seront reconnus par l'État et ne donneront lieu à enregistrement qu'après avoir été approuvés par l'Administrateur Général au Congo;
- celui-ci pourra déterminer les formes et les conditions à suivre pour la conclusion desdits contrats;
- sont interdits tous actes ou conventions qui tendraient à expulser les indigènes des territoires qu'ils occupent ou à les priver, directement ou indirectement, de leur liberté ou de leurs moyens d'existence.

Le Décret sur le louage ou contrat de service entre noirs et non indigènes (1888) prévoyait que :

- les noirs fournissent leur travail volontairement ou à des conditions par eux acceptées;
- les points qui ne sont pas stipulés dans les contrats seront réglés par les coutumes locales, pour autant que pas contraires à l'ordre public;
- tout travailleur noir qui serait l'objet de mauvais traitements de la part du maître peut demander aux tribunaux la résiliation de son contrat;
- tout contrat de louage de service doit être dressé par écrit et présenté au visa des autorités compétentes endéans le mois.

Le Règlement sur le traitement des noirs engagés au service de l'Etat (1889) prévoyait que :

- le temps qu'ils passent au service de l'État, les enrôlés reçoivent gratuitement les soins médicaux, des vêtements décents et une nourriture saine et suffisante, qui leur est distribuée en nature ou dont ils reçoivent la contre-valeur en monnaie ou en marchandises d'échange;
- des théories sont faites périodiquement aux noirs sur leurs droits et leurs devoirs et sur les décrets, ordonnances et règlements qui les concernent;
- l'autorité des fonctionnaires de l'État sur les noirs est exercée à la fois avec la fermeté nécessaire au maintien de la discipline et de l'ordre et avec un intérêt bienveillant ;
- les fonctionnaires de l'État sont responsables de la sécurité des hommes confiés à leurs soins ; ils veillent à l'observation des principes de l'hygiène, en réglant notamment les travaux et les exercices avec mesure, ils s'attachent à étudier la langue et l'esprit des moeurs des hommes sous leurs ordres ; ils s'efforcent d'élever le niveau moral et intellectuel de leurs employés noirs tout en évitant de froisser leurs sentiments et leurs préjugés; ils cherchent à stimuler leur zèle en appliquant sage-ment les peines et les récompenses.

Le Décret sur les Colonies d'enfants indigènes (1890)

Prévoyait :

- la procura-tion de moyens d'existence, d'éducation pratique et d'établissement en faveur des enfants victimes de la traite ;
- d'assurer la tutelle des enfants abandonnés ou à l'égard desquels les parents ne remplissent pas les obligations qui leurs incombent ;
- qu'ils seront astreints aux travaux que le Gouverneur Général détermi-nera, jusqu'à l'expiration de leur vingt-cinquième année, moyennant l'entretien, la nourriture, le logement et les soins médicaux qui leur seront donnés gratuitement.

Le Décret sur l'Investiture des chefs indigènes (1891)

L'investiture gouvernementale sera constatée dans un procès-verbal dres-sé en double original, dont l'un sera remis au chef reconnu et dont l'autre

sera conservé dans les archives du Gouvernement local.

Les chefs indigènes exercent leur autorité conformément aux us et coutumes, pourvu qu'ils ne soient pas contraires à l'ordre public, et conformément aux lois de l'État.

Le Décret sur la Commission pour la protection des indigènes (1896)

Les membres de la Commission sont nommés par le Roi-Souverain parmi les représentants des associations philanthropiques et religieuses.

La Commission, sous la présidence du Vicaire apostolique, comprenait 2 représentants de missions catholiques et 3 de missions protestantes.

Les membres de la Commission signalent :

- à l'autorité judiciaire les actes de violence dont les indigènes seraient victimes;
- au Gouvernement les mesures à prendre pour prévenir les actes de traite, la prohibition ou la restriction du trafic des spiritueux, et pour amener progressivement la disparition des coutumes barbares, telles que l'anthropophagie, les sacrifices humains, l'épreuve du poison, etc.

Décret sur le rapport des agents de l'Etat avec les indigènes (1896)

Les Chefs d'expédition et les Commissaires de district doivent veiller à ce que dans leurs relations avec les indigènes, fassent preuve du tact nécessaire pour éviter les conflits qui pourraient résulter de malentendus ou de pratiques heurtant les us et coutumes des indigènes ; à ne transformer les indigènes que progressivement ; attire leur attention sur le danger à vouloir obtenir des résultats trop rapides ; à entrer en négociation plutôt que de recourir à la force des armes ; de recourir à l'intermédiaire de chefs dévoués à l'État ; lorsque le recours à la force sera devenu inévitable le Gouvernement doit être renseigné exactement et complètement sur les motifs ; que, autant que possible, les vrais coupables soient seuls atteints ; aucun agent ne pourra entreprendre les hostilités contre les indigènes s'il n'a été dûment autorisé à cet effet ; les troupes régulières et auxiliaires qui participent aux opérations de guerre doivent toujours être commandées par un Européen ; la propriété des indigènes ne pourra pas être détruite ; sous aucun prétexte on ne pourra recourir à l'incendie des

villages ; les blessés révoltés devront être soignés avec sollicitude ; les cadavres des tués devront être respectés. Les Européens défendront absolument la mutilation barbare des cadavres telle que la pratiquent souvent les indigènes entre eux ; les femmes et les enfants doivent être placés sous la protection directe du chef des opérations ; Il est strictement interdit aux agents noirs en poste de prendre l'initiative d'une répression quelconque contre les indigènes ; les chefs d'expédition et commissaires de district sont personnellement responsables des agissements des postes noirs qui relèvent d'eux...

Dispositions additionnelles au Code pénal (1896)

Sera puni d'une servitude pénale quiconque aura mutilé un cadavre d'être humain ; aura provoqué ou préparé des actes d'anthropophagie, ou qui y aura participé.

Décret sur l'exploitation des forêts domaniales (1896)

Les agents préposés à l'exploitation du domaine privé consacrent tous leurs soins au développement de la récolte du caoutchouc et des autres produits de la forêt. Ils sont tenus d'accorder aux indigènes une rémunération fixée par le commissaire de district qui soumet son tarif à l'approbation du Gouverneur Général ; il fait comprendre que, rétribuer équitablement l'indigène est le seul moyen efficace d'assurer la bonne administration du domaine, et de faire naître chez lui le goût et l'habitude du travail.

Decrees issued by King Leopold II

Certain Decrees – issued by Léopold II, King of the Belgians and Sovereign of the Congo Free State – portray this much-scorned King in a wholly different light. All these Decrees were published in the Bulletin officiel de l'EIC well prior to the foundation of the Congo Reform Association (March 1904).

The Decree on land titles (1885)

- Non-natives must register their land titles.
- Land occupied by the native populations, under the authority of their chiefs, will continue to be governed as per the local customs and practices.
- Contracts made with the natives for the acquisition or rent of land, or parts thereof, will only be recognised by the State and be registered after having been approved by the Administrateur Général au Congo.
- He determines the nature of and the conditions to be adhered to for the conclusion of the aforementioned contracts.
- Any acts or conventions leading to the expulsion of the natives from the territories occupied by them, or which deprive them of their freedom and/or livelihoods, directly or indirectly, are forbidden.

The Decree on service contracts between Africans and non-natives (1888)

- Black people can either offer their work voluntarily or on conditions acceptable to them;
- Matters not stipulated in the service contract are to be settled in accordance to local customs, in as far as these are not contradictory to public order;
- Any black worker subjected to ill-treatment by his employer can request the courts to terminate the contract;
- Every services contract is to be drawn up in writing and presented to the competent authorities for endorsement within a month.

The Regulation on the treatment of black people employed by the State (1889)

- During the time in which they are in the service of the State, the enlisted individuals receive free medical care, decent clothing as well as a sufficient amount of healthy food that is distributed to them either in kind or in the equivalent monetary value or in tradeable goods;
- Briefings are regularly given to the natives in regards to their rights and duties, and about any decrees, rulings and regulations that concern them.
- The state officials are to exercise their authority over the black people with both the firmness necessary to uphold discipline and order, as well as with benevolent interest;
- The state officials are responsible for the security of the men entrusted to their care; they ensure that the principles of hygiene are complied with, moderate the level of work and activities, attempt to study the language and get a feel for the customs of the people under their orders; endeavour to keep up the morale and intellectual level of their native employees while avoiding to offend their feelings and beliefs; try to stimulate their enthusiasm by applying rewards and punishments in a wise manner.

The Decree on the Colonies for native children (1890)

- Child victims of slave trafficking are provided a means of living, practical education and accommodation;
- Guardianship of abandoned children or children whose parents do not fulfil their parental obligations is to be ensured;
- They will be required to perform the work as determined by the Governor General until the expiration of their twenty-fifth year, in return for their upkeep, food, accommodation and the medical care provided free of charge.

The Decree on the investiture of tribal chiefs (1891)

The governmental investiture will be recorded in a report drawn up in double originals, of which one will be handed over to the recognised leader and the other will be kept in the archives of the local Government.

The native leaders will exercise their authority according to their habits and customs, in as long as they are not contradictory to public order, and in accordance to state laws.

The Decree on the Commission for the protection of the natives (1896)

The members of the Commission are appointed by the Sovereign King from among the representatives of philanthropic and religious associations.

The Commission, under the presidency of the Apostolic Vicar, includes two representatives from Catholic missions and three from Protestant missions.

The members of the Committee are to report :

- To the judicial authority: acts of violence of which the natives are victim
- To the Government: measures to be taken against slave trafficking, the prohibition or the limitation of the traffic of spirits, and measures for gradually bringing about the disappearance of barbaric customs such as cannibalism, human sacrifices, the poison proof, etc.

The Decree on the rapport between state officials and the natives (1896)

- The expedition leaders and District Commissioners must be mindful to display the necessary tact in their relations with the natives in order to avoid conflicts potentially resulting from misunderstandings or from practices that are offensive to the habits and customs of the natives; to only change the natives progressively; and to be aware of the dangers of wanting to obtain results too fast;
- To negotiate rather than to resort to force of arms and to turn to the leaders dedicated to the State as intermediaries; in cases where a show of force has become inevitable the Government must be informed exactly and in full about the motives; in as far as possible, only the actual guilty parties should be affected;
- No agent may undertake hostilities against the natives unless duly authorised to do so;

- Regular and auxiliary troops participating in war operations must always be commanded by a European;
- The property of the natives cannot be destroyed; on no account will the setting on fire of villages be resorted to; wounded rebels must be treated with care; the corpses of those killed must be respected. The Europeans are to strictly forbid the barbaric mutilation of corpses as is often the practice of the natives amongst themselves; the women and children must be placed under the direct protection of the head of operations;
- It is strictly forbidden for stationed black agents to take the initiative of any kind of repression against the natives; the expedition leaders and the District Commissioners are personally responsible for actions undertaken by black stations under their command...

Additional provisions of the penal code (1896)

Anyone who mutilates a human corpse, who partakes in, incites or contrives acts of cannibalism will be punished by imprisonment.
The decree on the exploitation of state forests (1896)

The agents appointed to the exploitation of the private estate are to devote their efforts to developing the harvest of rubber and other forest-based products. They are required to provide the natives a remuneration as fixed by the District Commissioner who is to submit his tariffs to the Governor General for approval. It is to be understood that the fair payment of the natives is the only effective way to ensure the domain's appropriate administration as well as to create the taste and habit to work.

Forgotten testimonies

The Congo Free State

E.D. MOREL, A word for the Congo State, in the Pall Mall Gazette 19/07/1897. (E.D. Morel of the Congo Reform Association, vilifier of Belgian colonisation).

... Are all Belgians, who, in their own country, may be presumably reckoned as civilized beings, to be branded directly they find themselves in Africa with every imaginable crime, because charges of cruelty have been formulated against one or two of them ?

... Granting even that some accusations have foundation in fact, what European nation which has undertaken the heavy responsibility of introducing the blessings and vices of civilization into the Dark Continent can claim immunity for its representatives in this respect? Are our own records so entirely clean? Have we not at the present time a system very nearly approaching forced labour in a large part of our South African dominions?

... The work which the Belgians have accomplished in Tropical Africa ... will favourably compare with that of any other nation... In spite of the conduct of half a dozen scoundrels who are to be found in every country under the sun, the Belgians have much to be proud of. We cannot do them full justice here.

MAJOR JAMES HARRISON – 1904 (British officer)

As I came down the Congo River a copy of Mr. Casement's report was lent me to read, and I was more than surprised at the contents of a letter written by Lord Cromer, which was inserted as a prelude to the more serious indictment following.

That I am not alone in discovering so much that is good in the Belgian administration of the Lado Enclave is vouched for by other English officers who have hunted and travelled among the natives beyond the waters west of the Nile.

I assume from Lord Cromer's report, and from what I was told at Lado, that he only landed at the Kiro and Lado stations, so that the greater part of his report must have been founded on information supplied by others, which, besides being often incorrect, might possibly have reference to times gone by, when, I believe, a certain official was promptly dismissed for unfair treatment of the natives.

Another statement, that "the soldiers are allowed full liberty to plunder the natives", is by no means correct. During my journey I saw hundreds of soldiers being sent off on different work – such as postal, Government dispatches, fetching in porters, etc.; but not one ever left without having received cloth, beads, or wire sufficient to purchase all necessary food.

As for the way in which the Belgians have opened out the country, it is wonderful. The posts are now all well-built brick houses, and in a few months' time most of the barracks will be similar; excellent roads connect many of the posts, while all sorts of vegetables and fruit are being grown, cattle and sheep also being introduced in many parts. Though I was told in Khartoum by several of our officers who had been stationed on the frontier how well the Lado Enclave was run,

I must apologize for trespassing on your valuable space, but if I were to try and refute many of the statements I have seen in print I should have to trespass considerably more.

*Yours truly, James J. Harrison
Bachelor's Club, London, June 6th.*

As I happened to travel home on the same boat as Mr. Ave, an American missionary, who has for some years been in charge of this Mayumbe district, his statements to me may be of interest. Mr. Ave said that all these reports were untrue; that the district was governed by an officer who was most kind and considerate in all his dealings with the natives; that he had carefully readjusted the taxation so as to fall as fairly as possible with regard to villages and population of same; and that the

officer was universally respected by all the natives as a kind and just man.

This is the way Major James Harrison a few days later demolishes a side issue raised by Mr. Morel. The letter is addressed to the Editor of the Morning Post (London), and appeared in that journal of June 25, 1904 : While quite ready to take full responsibility for any letter or interview alluded to by Mr. Morel, I absolutely deny having attacked the character of our Consul in any way, nor did I find in Boma officers "showering abuse" on him. Like myself they (and most people over here with whom I have discussed it) did not think it a wise appointment, and certainly it placed Mr. Casement in an awkward and unenviable position; but after all he would only carry out his orders. But as to the travelling about on a mission steamer I most strongly assert it was a most unfortunate error. After the using of a mission steamer I hardly see that any work Mr. Casement might have been interested in originally could make any difference. Still, for his own sake it might be wise if Mr. Morel stated exactly what occupations or duties he was interested in, say, between 1885 and 1900.

My object in entering this Congo controversy is to try and place before the English public a more broad-minded view of the question, and while making allowances for the well-nigh insuperable difficulties the Congo Government have had to contend with, at the same time try to help on improvements for the future, rather than dwell entirely on the past. I can assure Mr. Morel that I am by no means alone in my «absurd views», but will be supported by others who have lately crossed the whole Congo State, blessed with an open mind. «

*Yours, etc., James J. Harrison
Bachelors' Club, London, June 24th*

Opinions held upon Belgian Administration in the Congo by three well-known Americans : Mr. James Gustavus Whiteley of Baltimore, member of the Institute of International Law who has represented the United States Government at several international congresses; the Rev. W.H. Leslie, a missionary of the American Baptist Missionary Union; Mr. Mo-hun, a former United States Consul at Boma.

MR. JAMES G. WHITELEY

(member of the Institute of International Law)

It is unfortunate that so many false impressions about the Congo have been accepted without examination. For example, there is a popular belief that the King runs the Congo "for revenue only", and that he oppresses the natives in order to extort money from them. The exact opposite is the truth. The king receives no revenue from the Congo Government; on the contrary the State owes its very existence to the generosity of the King, who advanced several million dollars to keep the Government going in its early struggle for existence.

The Congo was a sovereign State before the Berlin Conference was thought of. The first official acknowledgment of the new State came from the United States in the spring of 1884. It was afterwards formally recognised by other nations, and it entered the Berlin Conference on equality with the other Powers. It has never placed itself under the guardianship of any Power or collection of Powers. It has no connection with Belgium except that King Leopold happens to be king of each of them. The two Governments are entirely independent.

One of the great achievements of the Congo State has been the suppression of the Arab slave traders, who were in the habit of invading Central Africa, carrying off slaves to the eastern markets, and laying waste the country through which they passed. It is estimated that 100,000 natives were killed each year in these slave raids.

In this case, however, the anti-Congo critics have availed themselves of both false logic and false "facts". The facts are that the slave-raiders were finally vanquished and driven out by the Congo forces in the early nineties, after a severe struggle and at the cost of much Belgian blood. As the present Viceroy of India said some years ago : "The Congo Free State has done a great work and by its administration the cruel raids of the Arab slave-dealers have ceased to exist over many thousand square miles".

Another prevalent error about the Congo Government is in regard to the treatment of the natives by the officials. An impression has got abroad that there are many atrocities committed.

There have been cases in which the natives have been maltreated by minor officials, but these are isolated cases, and are severely punished by the authorities. Such cases have occurred in all public services where an attempt has been made to govern inferior races. Such things have happened in the Philippines, in British Africa, and in India. No colonising nation can cast a stone at King Leopold on that score. Among a large number of officials scattered over a vast territory there will often be one or two wicked stewards who spitefully use the natives. All that any State can do is to keep vigilant watch and to punish the wrong-doers, and this the Congo State has done. It has even established a Commission for the protection of the natives. By the decree of 1896, this Commission consisted of seven members, three being Catholic priests and four Protestant missionaries.

It has been said, among other things, that the State practically enslaves the natives by forcing them to pay a tax in labour. The tax is light. According to a statement made the other day by Baron de Favereau, it consists of 40 hours' work per month, and for this work they are paid at the regular rate of wages obtained in the district. It is a tax which helps the State and also helps the native, for it teaches him to work. It is one of the most civilising influences in African colonisation, for it is only by teaching habits of industry to the natives that civilisation can make any progress in the Dark Continent.

The Congo State furnishes a model for civilisation in new countries. A great work has been accomplished in Equatorial Africa, and, as a distinguished missionary said, «Posterity will place the name of Leopold at the head of human benefactors for the princely enterprise, perseverance, and sacrifices contributed by him in such a cause».

THE REV. W.H. LESLIE (American Baptist Missionary)

Mr. Leslie refers to the exceeding degradation of the Congo people twenty years ago. He states that, naturally, not a little evil remains, that immorality and various heathen practices are still prevalent. But he speaks with much enthusiasm of the social and moral uplifting and the industrial development within those twenty years. He says that the people are learning to work, are learning to read and write, are clothing themselves, and are building better houses. In other words, they are gradually adopting the manners and customs of civilisation.

MR. MOHUN (worked for the United States government as a commercial agent in the Congo Free State; volunteered to command a unit of Belgian artillery to force Arab slavers from the colony).

In my opinion, it would be impossible for anyone to give other than a favourable report on the work of the Free State in the Eastern Province. The administration is excellent. The country is quite quiet from the Falls to Tanganyika. The native tribes seem contented and happy, and are paid by the Government for every stroke of work they do. The price of rubber has increased, and every man who brings in rubber receives pay for it. Formerly robbery and murder existed to a great extent among the native tribes, but are now quite rare; and the old «Mwavi», or ordeal by drinking poison, seems to be disappearing. Justice is administered with an impartial hand, and I firmly believe the natives are beginning to appreciate the benefits of good government.

I have been astonished in coming down river from Kasongo to the coast to see what extraordinary changes have taken place. First, the administration is now established on a good, firm basis, and all the officials take an intelligent interest in their work, with the result that scandals are quite a thing of the past. The stations are all splendidly and solidly built in brick, and the grounds are laid out in a very pleasing way. The transport service by canoe between Kasongo and Stanley Falls goes

without a hitch, and thousands of loads go up river every year, absolutely unguarded, and the loss by theft is almost nil. The steamer service between the Falls and Pool is good, and an enormous improvement over the old days, especially in the matter of messing.

So far as I know, the whole country is tranquil, with the exception of a small portion of the Bangala district north of Bumba.

It has been the fashion during the past for travellers who have been in the Congo State to run it down in every way, but it gives me the greatest pleasure to be able to affirm that only a most captious critic would be able to find fault with its administration today.

With regard to specific pronouncement on the alleged murder of several hundred natives who failed to supply the required quota of rubber, I can say nothing, it having been out of my district. Personally, I do not believe it, excepting in a vastly modified degree; and I must point out that the authorities are taking such steps as must bring any offenders to summary justice. I absolutely deny the absurd attempt to fasten responsibilities upon the authorities for any acts of violence they cannot control from this side. Such acts committed while I was there would have been reported, and it is evident they are now taking steps to prevent, in so far as possible, any recurrence of them. In all human institutions there are imperfections; here and there employees prove themselves unworthy of the trust reposed in them; but these, in my opinion, are exceptions rather than the rule.

ALEXANDER DAVIS, *The Native Problem in South Africa*

The Congo atrocities campaign is fed upon just a sufficient substratum of truth to make it plausible. But the public in their administered sentimentality travel very wide off the true case.

Turning to the Congo Free State the general division of the territory, from an administrative point of view, is based on the districts at the

head of each of which is a district commissioner representing the State. The commissioner is assisted by sub-commissioners, but is alone responsible for the good order of his district. Their principal instructions, on which the State lays great stress, are to maintain friendly relations with the natives and whenever possible to prevent or patch up intertribal disputes; they are also charged with abolishing as far as possible barbarous customs and especially human sacrifices and cannibalism, still practiced over a large extent of the territory.... In close cooperation with the district commissioner is the native chief or chiefs of the district.

The institution and recognition of these are encouraged by the State in order to improve the relations between it and the natives, to consolidate authority over individuals, to ameliorate their condition, and to facilitate their regular contribution to the development of the country. The chiefs have, as a rule, to be first recognized as such by native custom, and are then officially recognized by the Government, and receive a certificate to that effect. They are allowed to exercise their usual authority according to native usage and custom, provided the same be not contrary to public order and is in accordance with the laws of the State. They are held personally responsible for their tribe's supply of public labor as notified to them annually. The acknowledged native chiefs number 258.

It may be merely remarked that no infant struggling State is likely to go to the great expense of such an elaborate and widely organized system of justice as has now been called into existence on the Congo, and furthermore that jurists of the character of those now serving on the Congo are not those capable of lending themselves to such practices. A certain amount of latitude must of course be made for the different conditions in individual countries, especially when in a state of savagery, but generally speaking the Congo tribunals do their duty as well as similar ones in British colonies.

The Sovereign and Government of the Congo Free State have stated over and over again that they desire justice to be rendered impartially,

and that it is necessary that offences committed by natives should not remain unpunished, so penal laws must also be applied to the whites who are guilty of illegal doings. The mere fact of having constituted a superior court of appeal with judges of different nationalities and of appointing foreign lawyers and magistrates as judges and officials of the lower courts in the interior of the country is a proof, and a more than evident guarantee, of the impartiality and seriousness of the judicial administration aimed at.

The writer holds no brief for the Congo Free State; rather the contrary in fact, but in common fairness after a very lengthy study of its judicial machinery, laws and decrees, and the instructions given to its officials, he finds it difficult to conceive what more King Leopold could have done to safeguard its internal affairs than has now been done - given the peculiar conditions of the country.

The abuses which have from time to time arisen in the past have been due, as far as one acquainted with similar conditions in West Africa can see, to three things, viz. : (1) to the abuse of power by agents of the concessionaire companies before the State had fully realised the necessity of keeping a sharp control over these semi-independent individuals; (2) to the want of experience of early officials; and (3) to the lack of trained colonial servants whose known antecedents and constitutions fitted them for isolated and arduous responsibility in an unhealthy, tropical, and savage country. It is only right to add, however, that through isolated misdeeds may still continue to occur here and there as everywhere else, the measures now in force guard as far as possible against a repetition of the former regrettable occurrences, and where these occur the offenders are brought to trial without delay.

The native idea represents that of primitive society everywhere in the world, the European that of latter-day civilization; and if this were always borne in mind, less nonsense would be written by those ill-informed sentimentalists who insist on treating the former on the lines of the latter.

VISCOUNT CURZON,
Viceroy and governor-general of India

It is only fair to remember that the Congo State has done a great work, and by its administration the cruel raids of Arab slave-dealers have ceased to exist over many thousands of square miles.

The late Marquess of Salisbury,
K.G., Premier of the British Parliament

Look at the Congo State. Everything has not gone there as well as it could be wished, but still a great domination is maintained. There are two sets of opinions; but what is undoubtedly true is that Belgium - a very much less powerful country than Great Britain - has been able to maintain the dominion of her King over a territory larger than the Sudan.

Lord Cranbourne, now Marquess of Salisbury, declared, during the debate of 20th May, 1903, in the House of Commons, that "There was no doubt that the administration of the Congo Government had been marked by a very high degree of a certain kind of administrative development. There were steamers upon the river, hospitals had been established, and all the machinery of elaborate judicial and police systems had been set up".

MR. J.A. MALONEY on Congolese slave traders

The offender was lucky if he escaped with instant death, for Msiri delighted in diabolical refinements of cruelty. Quite minor crimes were punished by the lopping off of a hand or the docking of an ear. In fact Msiri practiced mutilation almost as extensively at Kasongo.

MR. FREDERICK STANLEY ARNOT
(explored central Africa and met Msiri in 1886)

Mr. Giraud noticed some men whose noses or ears had been cut off. Mkewe's six drummers had a thumb on each hand but no fingers ... Mr. Giraud say that everywhere the Bemba people practice these barbarous customs. First the fingers and toes are cut off.

These quotations will surely prove that bodily mutilation is essentially an African barbarity that prevailed more or less among all the tribes of the Congo region, but is now almost entirely suppressed, thanks to Belgian civilization. The charge brought by Dr. Grattan Guinness against that civilization, that it introduced and practices this certificate of death, is a libel so monstrous that it carries with it its own refutation.

MR. GRENFELL : (English Missionary)

In the course of my tour I have been much struck by the order which has been established, and by the real progress accomplished. When the position of the country under the Arab domination is recalled, and when the relatively brief number of years since the termination of the military operations rendered necessary by the revolts is taken into account, the progress that has been made is nothing less than marvelous.

MR. WILLIAM FORFEIT : (English Baptist Missionary)

the mission at Upoto...The condition of the natives is much improved, all the villages of the district can be visited in absolute safety, and I beg to congratulate you on the tranquility of the district of which you are the Commissary-General. - March 14, 1903

MR. MAGUIRE : (English Missionary)

Though I have travelled by boat and on foot from Boma to Amadi and higher up to Surunga, calling at all the State stations; though I have visited many establishments, both Catholic and non-Catholic, as well as some stations of independent companies; though I have passed nights and days in my tent in the forest and in villages of natives; though I have had ample opportunities of seeing much in my journeys as to how the native was treated, I have never seen or heard of any of the atrocities with which the agents of the Free State are charged. On the contrary, one cannot but admire the wonderful progress that has been made in so short a time, the commendable way in which the natives are treated, the little work that is exacted of them and the manner in which they are punctually paid for every service rendered or work done. The little work which is occasionally exacted of them by way of tax in portage or otherwise is as nothing when compared with the immense benefits conferred upon them by the State. In fact the methods of Belgian officers drew a highly complimentary eulogium from the Sirdar during his recent visit to the Enclave of Lado - methods which he stated, might be followed with advantage by our English officers : "Messieurs", said the Sirdar, "nous avons d'excellentes leçons devant nos yeux". - March 31, 1904

DR. CHRISTY : (English Physician)

I went to the Congo last September as a member of an expedition of the Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine, which was dispatched especially to investigate sleeping sickness in the Congo I have travelled on foot in the Belgian Congo State, and personally observed the condition of things which prevails there. I assure you that if I were to tell you all I know against the Congo Administration it would amount to a very little indeed compared with what I know in its favor. The credulousness of the British Government in respect of the Casement report is something marvelous. Casement travelled up the river in a missionary steamer,

arm in arm with missionaries practically all the time, and obtained all his information from the river bank instead of personally investigating the various stories of outrage and mutilation which he received. It is the most astonishing thing that the British Government has given the Casement report so much credence.

As you travel through the Congo you cannot help feeling - at all events any one like myself, who has been through the British tropical colonies - that the amount of general advancement and civilization in the Congo Free State is far ahead as compared with our own. This is doubtless owing to the fact that the Belgians have made the natives work. The Belgians have gone on the principle, to begin with, that the native must be participating element in the development and civilization of the country - that is, that he must work with and for the white man, and thereby benefit not only the white man but himself. I was immensely impressed with the state of government and the advancement and general opening-up of the Congo, the more so as I can compare it with other districts under British control in which I have been. We do not attempt to make the native work, with the result that we do not get the benefit we should from our Protectorates. Uganda and British East Africa are far behind the Congo Free State. Not more than a third of Uganda is opened up to administrative control.

The Belgians have got stations everywhere in the Congo practically, and most of the natives, except in one or two areas, are entirely under control. The Uganda native is a fat, lazy chap, who will do no work. There is no industry in Uganda. The Belgians pay the Congo natives for their labor. They realize that the native is a valuable asset in the country, and treat him accordingly. It is surely obvious that it is not the interest of the Congo administrators to maim the native.

I have seen nineteen such men, chiefly Italians, in prison at Boma on charges of cruelty, which proves that the Belgians are doing their best to put a stop to the kind of things complained of. The agitation that is now going on about atrocities is exaggerated out of all proportion to the

amount of the atrocities that happened at any time. The Belgians are doing everything they can to supersede the men who have acted improperly in the past; they have appointed inspectors for different districts, and they have allowed inspectors appointed by the Italian Government and the Scandinavian Government to go out into the Congo for the purpose of keeping an eye on those of their own nationality in positions of responsibility and control in the Congo Free State.

Things in the Congo now are very different to what they were even two or three years ago. The King of the Belgians has sent out Baron Dhanis - who had more to do with opening up the Congo in the early days than anybody else - to reorganize the whole military system of the Congo Free State. There are to be two or three large military centers in the Congo, and the soldiers will be much more highly trained and be more under control.... The whole thing will be changed now, however, for they will have a much more highly organized army and a much higher class of officer.

With regard to the mutilations in the Congo, described by Mr. Casement, I may tell you that only last year in Uganda I saw similar mutilations, which, it is well known, were done by the natives in Uganda, notably in King Mtesa's day. In walking through Toro and Unyoro, I have seen men without noses, ears, and frequently, without hands.

With regard to Lord Cromer's assertion that in the Lado Enclave the natives have left the banks of the river and the immediate regions of the Belgian posts, - well, I have walked along the Nile from the Albert Nyanza into the Soudan, and visited the Belgian stations on the river, besides having seen a good deal of natives on both banks. I feel sure that Lord Cromer is wrong when he states that the natives are leaving the Belgian side and going over to the Uganda side.

The conclusion to which I am irresistibly driven as a disinterested observer is that the present administration of the Congo is not only free from cruelties, but of the most complete and efficient description, and

counts for the fullest commercial and industrial development of the Free State. I am sure that that administration is doing its level best in every way, from the highest to the lowest officer, to make the country prosperous, and the native happy and useful. - June 23, 1904.

HIS EMINENCE, CARDINAL GIBBONS

(American) Baltimore, Oct. 21, 1904

*To the Honorary Secretary, Congo Reform Association (E.D. Morel)
... your letter of the 18th instant. In that letter you call my attention to certain resolutions adopted by the Peace Congress at Boston. ...They express a desire for information in regard to the international status of the Congo Free State. the acts and the protocols of the Conference of Berlin, as well as of the Conference of Brussels, all prove conclusively that the Congo Free State is an independent sovereign State, and that the powers have no right of guardianship or intervention.*

Your letter also refers to certain documents, such as the British Parliamentary White Book, Africa no.7 (1904), which, however, has not escaped my attention. Permit me to say that this book, instead of proving your contention, proves the exact contrary, and shows that both the administration and the courts of the Congo are using their endeavors to correct such evils as may exist - for no human government is perfect.

The interpellation in the Belgian Chamber of Representatives, to which you refer, seems to have been simply a fruitless attempt on the part of the Socialist leader to annoy the Government. The very fact that the Chamber considered Mr. Vandervelde's charges against the Congo, and refused to sympathize with him in his views, is in itself a significant indication of the baselessness of his accusations.

In your letter you are also pleased to say that in speaking in defense of the Congo Government I have spoken «unwittingly», and to imply that I have not considered the facts nor weighed the evidence. I can assure

you that I have not spoken without due consideration. As to the evidence, it is overwhelmingly against your contention.

It is only some score of discontented men, depending largely on the untrustworthy hearsay evidence of natives, who have raised an outcry against the Congo Administration, out of a great band of 500 or 600 missionaries, both Catholic and Protestant, who are working on the Congo, and who give thanks to the Congo Administration for its support to the missions, and for its successful efforts to introduce Christianity and civilization into Central Africa.

Overwhelming evidence in favor of the Congo Government has been given recently by missionaries and by travelers, and it is not only Catholic missionaries, like Monsignor van Ronsle and Father van Hencxthoven, who have spoken in praise of the State, but also the most distinguished Protestant missionaries, such as the Rev. Mr. Bentley and Dr. Grenfell.

As it is not likely that you will convert me, and as I see no probability of convincing you, I, for my part, think it is best to consider the correspondence closed.

Viscount MOUNTMORRES

In the summer of 1904, an Irish peer, Lord Mountmorres, began a journey through the Congo Free State....The dismal scenes of torture, desolation, and death, in which the missionary-agents of the Liverpool merchants assure us that unhappy country abounds appear in some way to have escaped the observation of this traveler. "The further one goes into the interior the more civilized one finds it, the better organized, and the more developed".

Mrs. M. FRENCH SHELDON

(French traveler and author – after a tour through the Congo Free State – 1904)

I have witnessed more atrocities in London streets than I have seen in the Congo, which remark applies to the rubber country as well as the rest of the State. I travelled through every part of the country, and am convinced that the allegations of maladministration are groundless. Wherever I went I found the natives treated with kindness and consideration, while the improvements in the condition of the land and its inhabitants are almost incredible.

Henry WELLINGTON WACK,
The Story of the Congo Free State
1905 (American attorney)

This short era of civilisation has created in the Congo over four hundred commercial houses doing a thriving business with Europe; built railways over mountain routes where only Belgian engineers and Belgian capital had the courage and the skill to venture. In the midst of it all the black man's hands and acquired energy have provided him with new value to himself and to the State.

Industry and order, Christianity, civilisation, and material progress have succeeded tribal wars, cannibalism, and the horrible atrocities of the slave chase. This has been achieved by the brawny men of Belgium in less than twenty years.

While the English campaign against the Congo Administration was confined to nebulous libels, proceeding for the greater part from wrangling missionaries and aggressive traders, it was the policy of that Administration, conscious of its own rectitude, to ignore the attacks made upon it. In light of subsequent events, the wisdom of that course appears open to question. Did not one of England's poets observe that a lie seven times repeated without being challenged acquires the force of truth?

Roger Casement was sent to the Free State, where he traversed ground carefully mapped out for him, and interviewed natives specially instructed in their parts by the persons whose agitation had occasioned his mission. The result was precisely what might have been expected and that without impeachment of Mr Casement's integrity - an inaccurate and partial report.

The refutation of all its more important pronouncements will probably not disconcert Mr Casement's believers in the least, as they are immune to the logic of facts.

Nevertheless, the Sovereign of the Congo Free State, in order that the world may not accept as a thing against which no defence can be made the judgment passed upon his rule by the cliques banded together to embarrass or overthrow it, in July 1904, resolved to send a special commission to the Congo to inquire into the atrocities alleged to have been committed.

The committee is to travel throughout the country into all the districts covered by Mr Casement in his recent tour of inspection, besides visiting many places Mr Casement never saw. In brief, the committee is to hold inquiry wherever evidence can be obtained. Where native witnesses give evidence of a nature prejudicial to white men, the committee will see that such witnesses are protected from the possibility of suffering at the hands of officials against whom they may bear witness. The Government of the Congo holds itself responsible for the safety and well-being of such witnesses. On the latter point King Leopold has expressed himself in the strongest possible terms.

It is almost unnecessary to record that the committee has already been denounced by the enemies of the State on every conceivable ground. "A farcical commission" and "a bogus inquiry" are two of the descriptions which have been applied to it.

Read the book of Mr Bentley, an educated English missionary, who has been in Africa thirty years, and who saw the administration under which the natives lived when he arrived there. He expresses his admiration for the enormous progress which has been made, so far as the protection of the blacks goes, since they came under the government of the Congo State. Why are not the statements of this sterling man, so

eminently competent in all questions relating to the protection of the blacks, quoted?

But whatever may be said to the contrary, the system adopted by the Government of the Independent State is more equitable than any other system whatever, and imposes upon the natives a minimum of taxes. Each man's tribute is very small. In certain regions where the rubber is abundant, he can gather in one day the tax that is required of him for a month. Besides the work thus performed by the native being remunerated, their households find themselves in possession of some supplementary resources. The desire to add to their well-being increases each day.

The strong black races which cover many parts of its territory will acquire the habit of regular work, in place of their primitive idleness.

The story of the Congo Free State offers great opportunity for speculation and for prophecy. Taking a broad view of the opinion prevalent in Europe and the United States, the conclusion that Great Britain seeks to acquire important territory in Central Africa is inevitable. This theory of the anti-Congo campaign is strenuously denied by all unofficial persons engaged in that campaign. And yet there are unmistakable signs that of the many theories so industriously exploited, British acquisition of the keystone of African territorial possession seems to be most in line with the history of British methods of expansion.

The Free State is one-third the size of the United States. It lies squarely across the heart of Africa, with an outlet to the sea on the West Coast which brings it many miles and many days nearer European markets. It separates the British African Empire, - the Soudan and the Nile country adjoining the Free State on the north, from the Cape and the Boer war territorial acquisitions on the south.

The British and the Germans appreciate the vast possibilities of the great African Continent. While the former expands its territory by costly wars, the latter, by adapting its methods to suit the native populations, encompasses the African market.

While the former persists in imposing its ancient, crude, and ineffectual methods of colonial development, the latter, more modern, more direct, is gaining trade and influence which might belong to intelligent

British rule. The palsied arm and the obsolete method of regeneration, prevalent in the territories devastated by the Boer war, illustrate the incompetency of the present generation of British colonisers. Their failures are multiplying. It is the old story of worship of the Past, confusion in the Present, misconception of the Future.

The growth of the Congo Free State has from the first been skilfully directed by clever men of thought and action. Now that the transformation is complete, and what but three short decades ago was the very heart of savagery has become a valuable commercial and political asset, the forcible ejection from the African Continent of the authors of all this good is openly discussed! Such is the reward which is proposed should be meted out to the gallant, self-sacrificing little nation which has replaced the horrors of barbarism by the blessings of civilisation, and incidentally discovered vast material wealth. After disposing of the Belgian possession, that international pygmy, Portugal, occupying Delagoa Bay to the obvious chagrin of Britain, will be served with the long-expected writ of ejection. These little fellows in Africa will have but one choice of leaving - by the door or by the window. Will the world tolerate such iniquity? - An iniquity of the baser sort, veiled with specious pretence.

Propos du chef coutumier Manangame près d'Avakubi, 1907
(rapportés par Eskil Sundhagen, officier suédois de la Force Publique)

"Dans le temps, quand les Arabes étaient les chefs, ils prenaient nos femmes et enfants et les vendaient comme esclaves. Sans pitié ils pillaien le pays et brûlaient les villages. Le blanc ne brûle jamais des villages et si on va chez lui avec des poules et bananes, il nous paye toujours pour tout. Il paye bien aussi pour le Mupira (caoutchouc). Le blanc a éliminé le trafic d'esclaves et lui-même ne prend jamais d'esclaves. Mais nous les hommes noirs, on veut quand même que les blancs partent, parce qu'ils nous forcent à maintenir les routes en état et on ne peut plus faire la guerre contre les voisins et on ne peut même pas manger les prisonniers, car si on les mange, on est pendu!"
(référence code pénal) Décret du 18-09-1886).

Frederick STARR,

“The truth about the Congo”, 1907 (American anthropologist - after having spent 13 months in the Congo investigating E.D. Morel's assertions.

On flogging

It is plain that neither flogging nor the “chicotte” (whip) was introduced by Belgians. These found them in the country on their arrival, introduced by English and Portuguese.

I saw, of course, plenty of flogging. Not, indeed, with such an instrument as has been recently shown throughout the United States by a complaining missionary.

I have seen chicottes (whips) of a single thong (of hippopotamus skin), and of two or three twisted together, but I have never seen one composed of six.

Many a time, also, I have seen a man immediately after being flogged, laughing and playing with his companions as if naught had happened. Personally, though I have seen many cases of this form of punishment, I have never seen blood drawn, nor the fainting of the victim.

On the chain-gang

One sees chain-gangs at every state post; it is the common punishment for minor offenses to put the prisoner on the chain. Sometimes as many as twelve or fifteen are thus joined together by chains attached to iron rings placed about their necks.

The ring around the necks of these prisoners is a light iron ring, weighing certainly not to exceed two pounds. The weight of chain falling upon each prisoner can hardly be more than six or eight pounds additional. In other words, the weight which they are forced to carry in the shape of ring and chain does not exceed, probably does not equal, ten pounds.

It is no uncommon thing for both men and women to have a weight of thirty, forty, or fifty pounds of brass and iron rings and ornaments upon them.

I have never seen a chain-gang composed of women, nor have I seen women on the same gang with men.

It is a very mild form of punishment, and one which, of course, is common in as bad a form or worse throughout many of our Southern states.

On hostages

The taking of hostages and holding them until some obligation or agreement had been performed was a common native custom.

This seizure of hostages is mentioned repeatedly in the writings of the early travelers, and seems to have caused no outcry on the part of the sensitive civilized world at that time. Why should it now?

Of hostages held by company agents or by state people we saw but few and never learned the circumstances under which they had been taken. They were rarely in actual confinement, and we saw no evidences of bad treatment toward them.

While we have never seen maltreatment of hostages, we can readily understand how such could arise. Taken, as they usually are, in order to force the bringing in of food or forest products, if their holding does not produce the desired effect the feeling of vexation resulting may easily lead to cruelty.

On mutilation

People in this country seem to expect that every traveler in the Congo must meet with crowds of people who have had one or both hands cut off. We have all seen pictures of these unfortunates, and have heard most harrowing tales in regard to them. Casement, the English consul, whose report to the British government has caused so much agitation, and who described many cases of mutilation, himself saw but a single case; and that case, though put forward by the missionaries as an example of state atrocities, was finally withdrawn by them, as the subject had not been mutilated by human assailants, but by a wild boar. Casement traveled many miles and spent much time in securing the material for his indictment, and yet saw* but this one case.*

* I am here in error. Casement saw more than one case of mutilation; he carefully investigated but one.

We saw a single case of mutilation. It was a boy at Ikoko, probably some twelve years old. He had been found, a child of three or four years, by

the side of his dead mother, after a punitive expedition had visited the town. His mother's body had been mutilated and the child's hand cut off. No one, I think, would desire to excuse the barbarity of cutting off the hands of either dead or living, but we must remember that the soldiers in these expeditions are natives, and in the excitement and bloodthirst roused by a military attack they relapse to ancient customs.

There has, indeed, been considerable question recently whether the cutting-off of hands is really a native custom..... Glave says: «In every village in this section (Lukolela) will be found slaves of both sexes with one ear cut off. This is a popular form of punishment in an African village..... Where such customs were constant in native life it is not strange that they have lasted on into the present.

Of course, in this connection we must not forget that mutilation of dead bodies is not by any means confined to the Congo Free State, nor to its natives. Only a few months ago, in Southern Africa, the British force cut off the head of a hostile chief...

On rubber gathering/taxation

The native hates the forest; he dislikes gathering rubber; it takes him from his home, and comfort, and wife.

While there were things that might be criticized, there was apparent fairness in the business.

While the rubber was a demanded tax, a regular price of 1 franc and 25 centimes the kilo was paid. This was given in stuffs, of course, and the native selected what he pleased from the now abundant stock of cloths, blankets, graniteware, and so forth. It may truly be said that they came in singing gaily and went home glad.

I have seen many heart-rending statements in regard to the loss of work time which the man suffers by going to the forest to gather rubber. We are told that by the time he has gone several days' journey into the dense forest, gathered his balls of rubber, and returned again to his village, he has no time left for work, and his family and the whole community suffers as a consequence.

The man, before he went into the forest to gather rubber, had no pressing duties. His wife supported him; he spent his time in visiting, dan-

cing, lolling under shelters, drinking with his friends, or in palavers, sometimes of great importance but frequently of no consequence; in other words, he was an idler, or a man of leisure.

The thing which seems to me the worst is the kwanga tax on women and the fish tax on men. With the coming of the white man, and the establishing of a great post at Leopoldville, with thousands of native workmen and soldiers to be fed, the food question became serious. The state has solved the problem by levying a food tax on the native villages for many miles around.

When they have cared for the growing plants in their fields, prepared the required stint of kwanga, brought it the weary distance over the trails, and again come back to their village, they must begin to prepare for the next installment. For this heavy burden there must certainly be found some remedy. The condition of the men who pay the fish tax is analogous to that of these kwanga-taxed women.

On depopulation

The question of the population of the Congo is an unsettled one. (Various estimations 11,000,000; 17,000,000; 20,000,000; 29,000,000) Between these limits of 11,000,000 and 29,000,000 any one may choose which he prefers. No one knows, or is likely for many years to know.

Personally, I have no doubt that depopulation is going on. Of course, the enemies of the Free State government attribute the diminution in population chiefly to the cruelties practised by the state, but it is certain that many causes combine in the result.

Practically, the state of population is really known only along the river banks. Back from the riverine are inland tribes, the areas of which in some cases are but sparsely settled, while in others they swarm. They are, however, little known, and just how the population is distributed is uncertain.

If we take Stanley's estimate (29,000,000) as accurate, the population would average twelve to the square kilometer.

Among known causes for the diminution of Congo population we may mention first the raiding expeditions of the Arabs. These were nume-

rous and destructive in the extreme ... Organized for taking slaves and getting booty, they destroyed ruthlessly the adult male population and deported the women and children. There is no question that many of the punitive expeditions of the state have been far more severe than necessity demanded. Everywhere along the shores one sees the groups of palm trees marking the sites of former villages; probably the present population is no more than one fourth that which existed formerly.

Where the French Congo touches on the river, villagers move en masse across the river into French territory.... less well occupied by white posts This, however, can hardly be called depopulation, as it involves no loss in persons, but merely a transfer from the Free State side to the other. It does not at all affect the actual number of the race. Sleeping-sickness is carrying off its tens of thousands.

Robert STANLEY THOMSON

"La Fondation de l'Etat Indépendant du Congo"

1933 (professeur d'histoire)

Plus les Belges connaîtront les luttes que Léopold II a soutenues pour développer son œuvre et lui assurer une place dans la famille des nations, plus ils apprécieront leur héritage. Chaque année, la dette qu'ils ont contractée envers leur second roi leur apparaît plus inestimable, et chaque année met davantage en lumière la sagacité et le patriotisme de Léopold II. Si leur grande colonie africaine a beaucoup rehaussé la puissance de la métropole, elle continuera à augmenter, à l'avenir, la richesse du monde entier.

Jean STENGERS

“Congo - Mythes et Réalités” (professeur d'histoire)

A propos des attaques venues d'outre-Manche

Il y avait beaucoup à critiquer et à corriger au Congo, soit, on s'en rendait de mieux en mieux compte. Mais n'y avait-il pas des abus partout dans les colonies, et la philanthropie anglaise, si elle avait été sincère, n'aurait-elle pas du étendre impartiallement son action à tous les territoires coloniaux, à commencer par les colonies britanniques ? Une campagne menée pour « réformer » exclusivement le Congo paraissait injustifiée et, par là, suspecte.

A propos du Roi Léopold II

Léopold II, le Léopold II qui nous apparaît à la lumière des textes que nous connaissons aujourd'hui, a été bien un des hommes les plus étrangers à l'esprit de lucre tel qu'il est habituellement entendu. Mais ses grandes pensées, lorsqu'il maniait l'argent comme un instrument, étaient le plus souvent non pour lui-même, mais pour son pays. Le Congo, quoique Morel en ait pensé, ne lui a rien rapporté personnellement. Il a tiré de l'argent du Congo, mais il l'a utilisé presque exclusivement à enrichir le patrimoine national, par des acquisitions immobilières, par des constructions monumentales, par des travaux d'urbanisme. Sa hantise a été non sa propre fortune mais l'“embellissement” de son pays.

A propos des “Mains coupées”

Où l'on peut juger notamment que la délicatesse de Morel, dans l'ardeur de la lutte, s'est trouvée quelque peu en défaut, c'est lorsqu'il s'est agi de mettre en place le thème qui sans doute eut le plus d'impact émotionnel sur le grand public : le fameux thème des “mains coupées”. Quelques précisions sont indispensables pour comprendre la question. Il y a eu des mains coupées au Congo, à l'époque de l'Etat Indépendant... Des officiers de la Force Publique, pour empêcher le gaspillage des munitions auquel se laissaient volontiers aller leurs soldats, ont exigé que ceux-ci leur apportent la preuve qu'ils avaient bien utilisé leurs

cartouches. La preuve, c'était la main coupée à l'ennemi tué du coup de feu... Les mains coupées, on le notera, n'ont jamais constitué une forme de châtiment. ... En mettant l'accent, comme ils l'ont fait, sur le thème des mains coupées – un thème qui, on s'en rend compte, provoquait facilement l'émotion –, Morel et ses amis ont fait naître l'équivoque qui, finalement s'est répandue et a duré jusqu'à nos jours : l'idée que Léopold II faisait "couper des mains" au Congo, qu'il s'agissait là d'une torture infligée à la population, et même de la torture la plus caractéristique du régime.

Jean-luc VELLUT (professeur d'histoire)

La production du savoir colonial sur le Congo (botanique, zoologique, géographique, ethnologique, etc.) ne fut jamais l'apanage exclusif des scientifiques et des universitaires. Les militaires, les aventuriers, les missionnaires furent aussi de la partie et apportèrent des contributions notamment en cartographie et en connaissance des langues africaines. La création de parcs nationaux à but exclusivement scientifique permit également l'étude systématique de la faune et de la flore. Les concepteurs de l'entreprise coloniale et leurs équipes ont, en moins d'un siècle de colonisation, déversé sur la scène internationale un flot d'images sur le Congo, dont les premières présentations de culture matérielle congolaise à Tervuren en 1897 ou l'exposition universelle de Bruxelles de 1958 pour lesquelles le lieu de mémoire reste aujourd'hui le musée de Tervuren.

Pierre-Luc PLASMAN (professeur d'histoire)

...la figure de Léopold II occupe une place de choix pour laquelle s'affrontent deux visions dichotomiques, d'une part la condamnation du roi et d'autre part la défense du souverain.

A toutes choses égales, plusieurs facettes de cette polémique ne sont pas sans rappeler la campagne menée entre 1904 et 1913 par la Congo

Reform Association (CRA). Tout comme au début du XXe siècle, la dénonciation de l'action coloniale du roi se légitime en partie au nom des droits de l'homme et de l'indignation de la conscience; des associations réalisent un travail de propagandiste si pas d'idéologue; ces structures tentent d'avoir l'oreille de la classe politique; convaincus par ce discours, des hommes et des femmes politiques cherchent à porter le débat devant les assemblées; plusieurs chercheurs ou intellectuels prennent position et, comme à bien des égards Léopold II est un personnage romanesque, il continue à être croqué par la plume, le crayon et plus récemment sur la pellicule.

Un Janus royal a bien résidé au palais de Bruxelles mais il a régné avant tout comme roi des Belges pendant quarante-quatre ans, en liant le prestige de la couronne avec celui du pays. Il convient donc d'étudier toutes les facettes de son règne, comme l'a déjà fait l'oxfordienne Barbara Emerson (2), permettant de mieux comprendre qui était cet homme, ce chef d'Etats et de famille. Enfin, le bât blesse avec le discours dénonciateur qui s'érite en unique vérité et refuse l'apport de nuances. Pourtant, le débat sur le passé colonial belge et sur Léopold II peut évoluer favorablement en laissant le temps au temps. Aussi bien au Congo qu'en Belgique, une génération de chercheurs, qui n'a pas connu l'époque coloniale, se penche à nouveau sur ce passé commun dans la perspective de mieux le comprendre. Des résultats neufs et pertinents ont déjà été publiés mais qui restent encore largement méconnus du grand public. Des efforts doivent sûrement être réalisés à plusieurs niveaux comme une plus grande vulgarisation de la part des chercheurs et une plus grande probité intellectuelle des acteurs du débat.

André de MAERE d'AERTRYCKE (ancien Administrateur de territoire)

Je n'ai pas manqué de faire référence aux "abus et autres déficiences indéniable que ce rapport (Rapport de la Commission d'enquête de 1904) stigmatise à juste titre. Léopold II a évidemment, lui aussi, lu attentivement ce rapport. Il y a réagi très rapidement, avec une hon-

néteté, une perspicacité et une efficacité dignes de ce Roi visionnaire. Malgré ses conclusions accablantes, il n'a pas hésité à le faire publier - in extenso - au Journal Officiel de l'EIC (Etat Indépendant du Congo). Il a fait poursuivre les auteurs des abus et surtout pris dans la foulée une série de mesures radicales pour y mettre fin, en édictant pas moins de 24 Décrets à cet effet.

Les résultats ne se sont pas fait attendre et ont été à la mesure des dispositions prises.

Lord HAILEY (William Malcolm),
The future of colonial People, 1944, (former Governor of the Punjab)

Le développement du Congo Belge a été scientifique, en ce sens qu'il a pleinement reconnu la nécessité d'améliorer la condition de vie des indigènes et de former ces derniers d'une manière telle qu'ils puissent participer aux activités de l'industrie et de l'agriculture... Il y a peu de territoires dans lesquels on ait fait un emploi plus systématique des indigènes africains dans les travaux techniques et dans l'industrie.

L'effort fourni par les Belges est énorme, notamment dans les domaines de l'industrialisation, de la santé, de l'agriculture, de la construction de routes et d'habitations. La politique belge m'a frappé par son réalisme éclairé, et cela a renforcé mon respect pour l'efficience et l'esprit de résolution des Belges. Chers coloniaux qui travaillez durement, sous un ciel redoutable, à une œuvre patriotique et humanitaire, vous avez droit à l'estime et à la gratitude de vos compatriotes. Pendant la guerre, vous avez été, suivant la noble parole de votre chef, le gouverneur Pierre Ryckmans, quelques milliers à tenir un empire pour la mère patrie. Vous continuez et amplifiez l'action, souvent héroïque, des pionniers, cette cohorte valeureuse et clairvoyante qui sut servir les desseins du monarque au long regard. Certains d'entre vous sont morts sur cette terre d'Afrique qu'ils essayaient d'humaniser. Ils reposent dans ces cimetières émouvants de Léopoldville, de Stanleyville, de Kibati. Il y a de la chair d'hommes de chez nous dans la chaude terre africaine. Comment ne serait-elle pas près du cœur de tous les Belges.

Désiré DENUIT,

Le Congo d'jour d'hui, 1947

(Belgian journalist – reported on the Belgian Congo)

Jamais auparavant un homme, qu'il fut roi ou simple mortel, n'avait créé une pareille entité, et cela sans avoir recours ni à la conquête par les armes, ni à un mariage royal, ni à quelque assassinat. Cette entité fut conçue et parachevée, en majeure partie, par la pure diplomatie d'un souverain dont les armes - il est bon de le rappeler - n'ont jamais causé de nuits blanches à aucun ministère d'Europe.

André SIEGFRIED,

La Bataille du Rail, 1948

(sociologue, historien et géographe français)

Nous demandons à l'empirisme et au bon sens des solutions de sagesse que les systèmes raidissent toujours dangereusement. Avec notre manière simple, nous faisons tout doucement du Congo le chef-d'œuvre du continent noir, une terre prospère, saine, équilibrée. C'est moins spectaculaire pour les principes, et beaucoup plus favorable au bonheur des hommes. Les millions de malades soignés gratuitement dans les hôpitaux, les centaines de milliers d'enfants dont on débarbouille l'esprit dans les écoles, les stades, les maisons, les statistiques sanitaires et le sourire de la foule détendue, tout cela parle mieux et plus qu'un orateur lointain nanti d'idées fixes.

Tom MARVEL,
The New Congo
1949, (American journalist)

Jamais auparavant un homme, qu'il fut roi ou simple mortel, n'avait créé une pareille entité, et cela sans avoir recours ni à la conquête par les armes, ni à un mariage royal, ni à quelque assassinat. Cette entité fut conçue et parachevée, en majeure partie, par la pure diplomatie d'un souverain dont les armes – il est bon de le rappeler – n'ont jamais causé de nuits blanches à aucun ministère d'Europe.

It is rules, rules, rules, until they know them backwards. The rules are simple and there are no exceptions. The safety record of the road is higher than that of many U.S. lines.

With normal bonuses, an engine-driver makes from 800 to 1,500 francs (\$18 to \$35) per month, with housing, medical care, pension, and other benefits. Most important to him, however, is his standing among his fellows. He is of the élite among black professionals in the Congo, along with medical assistants, steamboat pilots, and teachers. How many American Negroes are permitted the responsibilities of such a job? Yet these Congo fellows have not had the background of three hundred years' contact with the whites and they seem to do pretty well. Forced labour, transported for hundreds of miles from more populous districts and thrown into stockaded compounds to work out its contract, might do it, as it has done in the past and is still doing in some parts of Africa. But the management was committed to a policy of native welfare under the Colonial Charter of 1908 and no such solution was considered.

Georges SION,
Voyage aux 4 coins du Congo,
1951 (Belgian playwright)

La Paix règne, mais de quoi sera faite cette Paix. La natalité noire augmente et le confort aussi. Incontestablement les services de Santé

belges sont les plus puissamment outillés d'Afrique. Les cinq mille missionnaires sont aussi les plus zélés et les mieux pourvus. Que dire alors de ces Belges heureux, d'autant plus chargés de responsabilités qu'ils ont mieux réussi dans leurs entreprises? Le bon sens belge fut le grand guide de l'entreprise Congo. A lui de la maintenir dans la voie de la sagesse. Elle fut et demeure une incomparable réussite.

Charles d'YDEWALLE,
Congo belge et Ruanda-Urundi,
1952, (Belgian journalist and author)

Tous les journalistes et les observateurs qui ont étudié l'Afrique sont d'accord : le Congo belge est la colonie où les indigènes sont les mieux traités, et où ils possèdent le standing de vie le plus élevé».

Gabrielle d'IETEREN et André VILLERS,
L'Afrique mouvante,
1953 (extensive Africa travelers)

Selon la règle coloniale qu'on désespère de faire comprendre aux Américains, les richesses n'ont pas été prises mais créées.

T.J. HICKEY,
The Statist,
1955.

This is something new in world history; for the Belgian attitude to Belgium's colony is unlike the corresponding view in Britain, in France, in Portugal or in Holland. The outstanding success of it prompts the reflection that Belgium may now have a message for the other colonial powers of the latter half of the twentieth century.

Georges DUHAMEL de l'Académie française

Dans "Le Figaro", 1955

Si nous n'avions mille raisons pertinentes d'admirer l'œuvre des Belges dans leur belle colonie du Congo, nous pourrions encore les louer et les remercier d'une chose essentielle pour les visiteurs de ma sorte : en arrivant du Sud, on éprouve un véritable soulagement à voir les Africains sourire, rire et chanter.

Dans "Sabena Revue", 1958

Je forme des voeux ardents pour que la Belgique pût continuer une œuvre belle et vraiment respectable, en un temps où l'équilibre général du monde est menacé de toutes manières. Je fais des voeux pour ne point mourir sans avoir revu ce Congo belge dont le souvenir me réchauffe le cœur et me donne de l'espérance, même aux heures d'an-goisse.

Henry VALLOTON,

historien, ancien président du Conseil national Suisse,

Ambassadeur de la Confédération helvétique en Belgique, 1955 :

Deux faits m'ont particulièrement frappé : l'air heureux des Noirs, la sécurité absolue du pays... Le pays des razzias cruelles, de la traite impitoyable, des guerres entre tribus, des flèches empoisonnées, de l'anthropophagie est devenu, en un demi-siècle, le pays le plus sûr du monde...

Sir Théodore CHAMBERS,

1955 (africaniste britannique)

Dans aucune région minière d'Europe, on n'a autant fait qu'au Katanga pour rendre la vie agréable aux travailleurs.

Panorama of the World, 1955

It is remarkable, considering the relatively modest material available to the Belgians, that they have been able in 70 years to transform this land from an unknown territory into one of the most alluring corners of the world.

E. M. LANG et E. SCHULTHESS *Le Congo mystérieux, 1957*

We have come back from this study an even greater appreciation of Belgian genius for building and administration. The problems of today seem great at the moment but we are sure, however in the light of the enormous past achievement in the Congo and Rwanda Burundi that adequate solutions will be found.

Extrait d'une lettre de deux membres du Congrès des Etats-Unis après un voyage d'étude en Afrique - 1959

Adlaï STEVENSON, Vice-président des Etats-Unis, 8 juin 1957

L'effort fourni par les Belges est énorme, notamment dans les domaines de l'industrialisation, de l'enseignement, de la santé, de l'agriculture, de la construction de routes et d'habitations. La politique belge m'a frappé par son réalisme éclairé et cela a renforcé mon respect pour l'efficience et l'esprit de résolution des Belges.

Baron SCAMMACA DEL MURGO,
Ambassadeur d'Italie en Belgique,
5 décembre 1957

Il suffit d'évoquer certains aspects du Congo pour mesurer à la fois, la tâche vraiment gigantesque que la Belgique s'est assignée, le cou-

rage avec lequel elle a poursuivi son effort et les résultats qu'elle a obtenus. Car, de pays exportateur de matières premières, le Congo est en passe de devenir un pays transformateur, en mesure d'utiliser pour son propre développement, son potentiel économique.

Julio GARCIA LOURDES, Auge, Mexico, 1958

For years the Congo has been almost unique in its peacefulness, while unrest swept over the rest Africa.

Gédéon RAFAËL, Ambassadeur d'Israël, 28 octobre 1959

Je suis fasciné par les réalisations industrielles de l'Otraco et de l'Union Minière du Haut-Katanga, par le haut degré de développement économique et notamment par les méthodes de construction industrielle. C'est tout à l'honneur des Belges que le rendement des travailleurs noirs puisse être comparé à celui de n'importe quel travailleur d'autres nations industrialisées.

Le Monde diplomatique

Une puissance économique au cœur du continent africain, juin 1959

Ce souci honore le gouvernement belge, qui peut également s'enorgueillir d'avoir installé la première université d'Afrique centrale à Kimuenza, près de Léopoldville.

Grâce aux efforts déployés par la Belgique, un vaste pays aux conditions naturelles rappelant celles du bassin de l'Amazone s'est éveillé à la vie moderne. Ouvert cependant trois siècles plus tard que la forêt amazonienne à la civilisation occidentale, le Congo belge constitue aujourd'hui le meilleur exemple de réussite économique de la colonisation européenne en Afrique centrale. Grâce aux gigantesques moyens techniques et financiers mis en œuvre, le Congo peut valablement prétendre au rang de puissance économique mondiale.

Dirk THYS van den AUDENAERDE,
Directeur du Musée Royal de l'Afrique Centrale à Tervuren, 1989

Si durant des décennies la Belgique fut grande, si elle a pu jouer parmi les nations un rôle important, ce fut grâce à sa présence en Afrique, à ses responsabilités et à ses réalisations au Congo Belge dont le territoire couvrait quatre-vingt fois celui de la petite nation mère. Cette ignorance de la situation véritable au Congo, de la vie de tous les jours des agents coloniaux et de leurs réalisations de part et d'autre de l'Equateur, a été – et est resté – une donnée constante en Belgique, et cela dès les toutes premières phases de notre présence en Afrique. Ayant réussi lors de la Conférence de Berlin de 1885 à se faire accorder le territoire de l'Etat Indépendant du Congo, réussite diplomatique hors format et sans égale dans l'Histoire, Léopold II se voyait déjà contraint d'affronter cette indifférence, voire cette opposition de l'opinion publique belge envers l'œuvre d'outre-mer.

Kaï CURRY LINDHAL, 1961, (Swedish naturalist)

It is no exaggeration to say that, in the social field, the former Belgian Congo was the most advanced country in Central Africa.

L'Echo médical, mai 1962
Rapport de l'Organisation Mondiale de la Santé

Le principal obstacle rencontré par nos experts réside dans le fait que les colonialistes ont pratiqué au Congo une médecine de luxe, et qu'en conséquence, au moment de l'indépendance, ce pays avait sur le plan médical vingt ans d'avance sur les autres régions d'Afrique ... La politique de l'OMS vise à provoquer, dans les limites budgétaires acceptables, des progrès durables dans de vastes ensembles géographiques réunissant nombre de pays voire un continent entier. Par conséquent, l'avance du Congo sur les autres pays de l'Afrique noire doit être amortie...

NB : le budget médical du seul Congo belge était à l'époque de loin supérieur au budget de l'OMS pour l'ensemble de la planète !

Tom De HERDT, 2011, Marc PONCELET et al, 2010

À la fin des années 1950, cette école primaire au Congo belge scolarisait les enfants dans des proportions de 3 à 5 fois supérieures à celles qui prévalaient dans les colonies françaises. Le taux de scolarisation primaire variant de 50 à 65 % selon les sources (dont une forte composante professionnelle néanmoins limitée à deux ou quatre années d'études) était l'un des plus importants en Afrique au Sud du Sahara.

Témoignages de Congolais

Patrice E. LUMUMBA

Le Congo, terre d'avenir, est-il menacé ?

1956, (first Prime Minister of the independent République du Congo)

La communauté Belgo-Congolaise est en voie de réalisation, et nous rappelons avec plaisir la déclaration qu'a faite Sa Majesté le Roi Baudouin, notre Roi bien-aimé, que 'la Belgique et le Congo ne forment qu'une seule nation...'

En jetant un coup d'œil rétrospectif sur le passé, en comparant le Noir de l'Etat Indépendant et celui de l'année 1956, le Congo d'hier et celui d'aujourd'hui, on peut reconnaître en toute conscience que la Belgique n'a pas failli à sa mission, et qu'en dehors de quelques erreurs inhérentes à toute œuvre humaine beaucoup de belles et grandes choses ont été réalisées et continuent à se réaliser.

Anicet KASHAMURA

dans *La Presse Africaine*, 22/12/1956.

Si le communisme et le panarabisme sont des dangers permanents pour l'Afrique, les indigènes qui réfléchissent, savent très bien qu'un autre danger les guette, le départ de l'Européen.

Si les Belges quittaient le Congo, ce serait un des rares cas où l'homme puisse abandonner un patrimoine qu'il a hérité au prix de généreux sacrifices, bien plus qu'au prix de combats. Le Belge ne partirait pas sans résistance, quand il pense aux capitaux investis, et aux nouvelles et jeunes générations qu'il a formées. Tandis que d'autres pays fabriquaient et vendaient des armes, la Belgique civilisait le Congo dans la paix et ses enfants perdaient leur vie sous un climat tropical Never before had an individual, whether king or commoner, created such an entity and it was all done without the classic assistance of armed conquest, royal marriage, or assassinations.

Télésphore KOMBA-KIOKENGÀ

Président de la Coalition des paysans congolais (COPACO),
La Libre Belgique, 22 décembre 2001.

Colonisés, nous mangions à notre faim. Indépendants, nous mourons de faim... Colonisés, nous étions bien soignés jusqu'au fin fond de nos brousses dans des hôpitaux et dispensaires parfaitement équipés. Nos enfants naissaient dans des maternités convenablement tenues. Indépendants, les Africains meurent, crèvent littéralement dans des hôpitaux insalubres. Dans certaines régions, dispensaires et maternités tombent irrémédiablement en ruine. Les grandes endémies reviennent au galop.

Colonisés, nous jouissions d'une scolarité gratuite, vivante et efficace pour l'alphabetisation, l'éducation et l'instruction de nos enfants. Indépendants, nous sommes aux prises avec une scolarité fort chère pour de nombreux parents sans ressources. Ceux qui, au prix de lourds efforts, font diplômer leurs enfants, voient ces efforts annulés, la science

et le savoir de leurs enfants dénigrés, niés ou méconnus sous le fallacieux prétexte d'établir un équilibre ethnique qui consiste à rejeter ou à fausser les meilleurs résultats au profit des médiocres.

Colonisés, nous jouissions d'une relative liberté d'exprimer ouvertement nos opinions, de revendiquer nos droits, ce qui nous valut du reste nos indépendances, nonobstant l'impréparation de certains de nos tribuns. Aujourd'hui, l'indépendance assassine les libertés des Africains : celle, notamment d'exposer une opinion de ce genre, de la publier en Afrique pour informer les Africains...

En fait, la liberté en matière d'opinions politiques, d'information et de presse demeure méconnue dans l'Afrique indépendante...

Hommage à toi, Colonisation. Tu engendras nos Etats, intangibles dans leurs contours actuels. En chacun, tu construisis des capitales et des villes, des hôpitaux et des églises, des écoles et des usines... Nous suivions des sentiers. Tu traças des routes, des rues, des boulevards. Nos cases étaient disséminées pêle-mêle ou groupées. Tu nous en construisis d'autres étiquetées de numéros.

Hommage à toi, Colonisation. Tu nous léguas des institutions. Sous ton autorité, de nouveaux ensembles se formèrent, englobant nos villages. Ta loi réorganisa la jungle en provinces, districts ou chefferies.

Hommage à toi, Colonisation, qui appris à lire et à écrire, à chiffrer et à compter... Hommage à toi, Colonisation. Aurais-je, sans toi, évolué ou me serais-je modestement limité à l'horizon de ma tribu ?

Hommage à toi, Colonisation. Tu me crées un continent. Tu m'offris un pays, me le mis en valeur : décloisonner les tribus, ouvrir les ethnies, rassembler frères et soeurs ennemis et les forcer à se supporter, à se connaître, à cohabiter, à aimer, à se marier... Surprenant tour de force qui te fit surnommer chez nous «Bula matari», ce qui veut dire concasseur de pierres.

Je te rends hommage, Colonisation. Tu m'appris de mon pays une histoire différente de celle que me narraient, les soirs, les contes de mes grands-parents, relatant uniquement mon ascendance tribale. Grâce à tes tremplins, je puis désormais de moi-même m'ouvrir à l'infini...

Patient BAGENDA

Le Congo malade de ses hommes, Ed. Luc Pire, 2003

Il a en retour donné du travail, il a assuré des soins médicaux, il a construit des écoles et des hôpitaux, il a ouvert des routes et mis en place des services de base et des infrastructures de développement.

Par contre, le colonisateur noir, le congolais, a détruit le pays, il n'a pas entretenu ce que le Belge a laissé : il a détourné les ressources du pays, il n'a pas donné du travail, il n'a pas payé les fonctionnaires, il n'a rien construit. Il a abusé et usé de l'arbitraire, il a bradé la souveraineté du Congo, il a appauvri son peuple et son pays. Il a compromis l'indépendance en la mettant à son service personnel et à celui de ses soutiens internes et externes.

IGNORED FACTS

Time line

- Conférence géographique de Bruxelles (12/09/1876) - exploration of Central Africa.
- Association Internationale Africaine - AIA (1877) - organisation of expeditions.
- Comité d'Etudes du Haut Congo (1878) - agreement between King Léopold II and H.M. Stanley (after UK refused his offer of service).
- Association Internationale du Congo – AIC (1882) – treaties between Stanley and native chiefs.
- Conférence Internationale de Berlin (1884) - to define the boundaries of the Congo Basin.
- Acte Général de Berlin (1885) - stipulates freedom of trade and navigation; neutrality of the Congo; abolition of slavery; improvement of moral and material condition of natives. Belgian Parliament recognizes sovereignty of King Léopold II over AIC.
By Decree AIC becomes Etat Indépendant du Congo – EIC / Congo Free State (29/05/1885). King Léopold II becomes absolute sovereign. Ratification by Belgian House and Senate (28 and 30/04/1885). United States of America first State to recognize CFS (11/09/1885).
- Belgian Congo - EIC becomes a Belgian colony (15/11/1908).
- Table Ronde - Belgo-Congolese conference in Brussels to decide on independence (January 1960).
- République du Congo (30/06/1960).

In total Belgium's presence in the Congo lasted 80 years, less than 4 generations.

Belgium's colonisation of the Congo lasted 52 years, 2 generations.

To realise the Congo's extraordinary development one could even subtract the severe economic crisis of the 1930s and the two world wars.

SLAVERY – FORCED LABOUR

Of all colonial powers, Belgium was the only one not guilty of slavery. It successfully fought and eliminated slave trafficking in the territories it controlled (Congo Basin and Lado).

Slavery was already widely practiced in Africa by the Africans amongst themselves, before the arrival of the colonizers.

The Arab-Islamic slave trade, which was by far the most murderous, started in the 8th century and was halted by colonisation in the 20th century. As a form of tax, the Congolese were forced to work for the state one week per month. Forced labour is, however, not synonymous with slavery.

KING LÉOPOLD II

The King longed for territorial expansion, an aspiration that was realised when the international community granted him the Congo Basin. These lands, which no other nation wished to claim, later turned out to be extremely rich in resources; a fact that caused great envy amongst those who had let this treasure slip through their fingers.

Of all his actions, it appeared immediately that the King wanted to establish a model state in which the native population was to be treated with dignity, in the spirit of the times, of course.

Like other colonial powers, he did obviously not hesitate to exploit the territory's wealth. Unlike others, however, he wanted to add a humanitarian dimension to his enterprise by putting an end to the tribal wars and the raids of the slave-hunters who drained the country of its lifeblood.

It was also under his impetus that the first schools and first hospitals were set up and programs for the eradication of yellow fever, sleeping sickness and malaria were launched. At the same time, he enforced the rule of law with an independent judicial organization. He made special efforts to provide the country with the infrastructure necessary for its economic development and built the first railway providing access to the Atlantic coast, without which «the Congo was not worth a penny».

On his own initiative, the Independent International Commission (1904) investigated onsite the accusations of maltreatment levelled against his regime. Whilst denouncing abuses and other undeniable shortcomings, the Commission nevertheless recognised the State's achievements in particularly laudatory terms.

Despite the damning conclusions of this report, the King did not hesitate to have it published - in full - in the Official Journal of the Congo Free State. He ensured that the perpetrators of the abuses were prosecuted and, above all, took a series of radical measures to put an end to the abuses by enacting no fewer than 24 decrees to this end.

Under the visionary impulse of Léopold II, the Congo became a unified State in 75 years, and that within the borders that are respected to date.

King Léopold II is the founding father of the Congo as the Congolese themselves readily admit. Colonial statues in the Congo have been restored.

COLONISATION

At the time of the takeover of the Congo by Belgium in 1908, the philosophy of the system was not addressed as colonialism, an integral part of the spirit of the times and of European history, simply wasn't questioned by anyone, not even by the most progressive minds of the time.

Congo is the only country where the colonial authority was respectful of customary laws. The state was managed by an efficient and productive

administration counting very few public servants (684 in 1930 and less than 2000 in 1960).

Belgium set up a coherent and progressive development programme (already initiated under the Congo Free State) for its colony: a communication network, big infrastructure works, the development of self-sufficient agricultural network that could also export, a network of hospitals and health centres for free medical care, eradication of endemic diseases, and progressive education for the entire population.

At the time of the transfer of power in 1960, the Congo had almost the same GDP as Canada, an easily accessible country that had undergone 400 years of colonisation and development.

EXPLOITATION

Belgium does not owe its wealth to the exploitation of its colony. In the 19th century, when King Léopold II was trying to expand the country through the quest for colonies, Belgium was already the second most industrialised country in the world, after the United Kingdom. In fact it was thanks to the wealth and power of Belgium among the nations, that King Leopold was able to be recognized as 'entitled' to be entrusted with the Congo.

The colonisation of the Congo was definitely an enterprise with an economic agenda that yielded considerable profits to those who took part in it. Undeniably, it indirectly had a very favourable outcome for the Belgian economy. It was seen as a win-win for everyone, including for the Congolese people.

From the beginning of Belgium's takeover of the Congo in 1908, the colony was fully self-sufficient. The budgets of the homeland and the colony were completely separated. The taxes collected in the Congo were entirely reinvested locally for the country's development.

The coloniser did indeed enforce and introduce a whole set of norms and values, admittedly our own, but in essence universal norms and values.

GENOCIDE

Depopulation did take place at the beginning of the colonisation. Its causes are known, but it is impossible to quantify the depopulation as there are no population data about these lands before the arrival of the Belgians. The International Inquiry Commission of 1904 attributed the depopulation to two main causes : smallpox and the sleeping sickness.

Other causes of depopulation : tribal fighting; the deportation of slaves by the Arabized, malnutrition, the unintentional introduction of new diseases, fertility problems....

In the easily accessible European countries, the well-oiled Nazi killing machine consisting of 1.5 million soldiers, aided by tens of thousands collaborators and compliant administrations, driven by an ideology of hatred, managed to kill 6 million Jews.

In comparison it is absurd to assume that in the Congo, a very small number of people (14.000 soldiers and 400 officers of various nationalities) scattered over a rather impenetrable terrain the size of Western Europe, would be able to eliminate 10 to 20 million individuals in a few years.

To claim that the Congolese population was halved during the Congo Free State period is just as ludicrous. It takes many generations to overcome the halving of a population; when the Congo became independent in 1960 it counted 4.4 inhabitants per Km², thereby being the by far most populated country in black Africa (e.g. 1.9/Km² inhabitants in the French Congo).

THE ALLEGED PRACTICE OF CHOPPING OFF HANDS

The following excerpts of Decrees drawn up by King Leopold II clearly indicate how he felt about such practices and dealt with them in reality :

- *The Europeans are to strictly forbid the barbaric mutilation of corpses as is often the practice of the natives amongst themselves; the women and children must be placed under the direct protection of the head of operations.* (Decree 1896).
- *Anyone who mutilates a human corpse, who partakes in, incites or contrives acts of cannibalism, will be punished by imprisonment.* (Penal Code 1896).

Unfortunately, the ancestral practice of mutilation is still prevalent in today's Black African conflicts.

An approximate hundred European concessionaires were operational in certain areas of the Congo qualifying for the collection of rubber. Amongst these there were, sadly, a number of reckless adventurers who engaged in exploitative and even criminal practices in order to make as big as possible profit. But the cutting off of hands is not likely to have been considered as the most efficient way to boost the rubber harvest, especially in areas with an acute labour shortage.

FORCE PUBLIQUE

The two first Allied victories during the First and Second World War were those won by the Belgian Congo Force Publique, in Tabora (Tanganyika) in 1916 and in Saio (Abyssinia) in 1941.

MEDICAL CARE

Free medical care was dispensed to even the most remote parts of the colony.

The medical budget of the Belgian Congo was higher than the WHO's budget for the entire planet.

EDUCATION

The most significant deed brought about by Belgium's colonisation of the Congo was that the local population's general development was assured through the provision of a free and high quality education for the benefit of all Congolese.

In 1960, the Belgian Congo counted the highest percentage of schooled children, as well as the highest literacy rate of all Black African countries. The planning of the colonial administration was for a gradual upward expansion of the education to all Congolese people, with an increasing development of the secondary level, to be followed by the university level.

And when independence came about the country counted two universities that were frequented by several hundred Congolese students (Lovanium - 1954; Lubumbashi - 1955).

Even at the university level, the Belgian Congo was among the pioneers in the colonial systems :

Foundation of Universities in other Black African countries :

Ethiopia (1950), Zimbabwe (1952), Afrique centrale française (1959), Cameroun (1961), Tanzania (1961), Angola (1962) , Uganda (1963), Zambia (1966), Centrafrique (1969), Kenya (1970) And Gabon (1970).

ECONOMY

In 1958, Congo's GDP per capita was \$90, the highest in Africa.

AGRICULTURE

The State developed local agriculture and animal breeding in a scientific manner in order for the Belgian Congo to become self-sufficient.

There was never any food scarcity under the colonisation.

A wide range of 20 products were exported, an exceptional feat for a

developing country. These products represented 40 % of the value of total exports.

SCIENTIFIC INSTITUTIONS

Before developing the country it was necessary to first understand its potentials. Therefore Belgium created scientific institutions that were given the task to study the human, physical and biological environment. Different institutions were responsible for mapping surveys, as well as research on geology, geodesy, meteorology and agronomy.

The agronomy research station of Yangambi in central Congo became the leading reference worldwide for tropical plants.

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